

DEVIZES RFC AGM: JUNIOR SECTION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Devizes RFC Junior Section has had a superb 2022-2023 season. The post-Covid era has been a story of a great recovery and then the building of strength in depth at all age grades. Not only are our teams now competitive, they have taken on the best within Dorset & Wilts (DW) and acquitted themselves superbly both on and off the pitch. The warm acclaim from opposition coaches, supporters and players alike for the skill and great spirit with which Devizes RFC Junior Section has conducted itself on match days, is something of which the Club, its coaching set-up, players, parents and supporters should be justly proud.

None of the above would have been possible without the great dedication and huge effort of the fifty-plus volunteers who support the Junior Section. The coaches, first aiders, referees, team managers, wider volunteers, the Junior Committee and the kitchen team collectively are supporting a healthy number of 265 age-grade affiliated players. Word is clearly spreading too about what a great Club we all enjoy because week-on-week the Junior numbers continue to grow.

The Junior Section recognises though that none of this would be possible without in particular: Julian Roberts, who single-handedly provides the great pitches and training areas; Niall MacLean, the Club Treasurer; and Del Poole, who with Julian and Niall manage the facility. The Juniors also thank Devizes Cricket Club for letting us use the second cricket pitch throughout their off-season, without which we simply could not function.

Off the pitch and as recognised with a presentation at the Junior Section end of season meals, the stand-out performance has been in the kitchen. Under the outstanding leadership and management of Nicola Hitt, an incredible 4546 hot meals have been served along with 870 sausage rolls and bags; the fact that there has been little waste speaks volumes for the quality of the food. Simultaneously Nicky has refreshed the kitchen per se, providing further revenue opportunities for the Club.

On the pitch it has been a real joy to see so much fabulous attacking play, ball in hand across the age groups, complimented by great defensive work whether that be at tag or full contact. This has manifested itself at the top end with the U14s and the U15s winning their DW Championship Plates, the U16s taking the title at the Bath Cluster, and the Colts, not only as runners up in the DW Premier League which contains some huge teams but losing the DW final by just one point. As ever, success at the Junior level is reflected in the senior squads. As the season has progressed not only have Colts players seamlessly slipped into the 1XV and 2XV sides, they have positively distinguished themselves in matches for them.

With such an array of talent, choosing the 2023 Dick Bull trophy recipient from amongst the 15-a-side teams was always going to be a difficult challenge. The field was whittled down to three people from different age groups, all of whom would have been worthy winners. In the end and following a vote within the Junior Committee, the Dick Bull trophy was awarded to a player who epitomised the spirit of rugby both on and off the field, having suffered a potentially life-changing injury during the season and recovered: Riley Heyes of the U16s.

The Junior Section will see a number of faces change in the Junior Section set-up in the new season and of course the new tackle laws; nevertheless, it will be starting in fair shape and with renewed ambition to develop even further. Key to realising this ambition will be expanding our volunteer-base: all new-comers will be welcome! **(Chris Long, May 2023)**